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U.S. House of Representatives
Committee on Natural Resources
Washington, DC 20515

Opening Statement of
Chairman Don Young
Subcommittee on Indian and Alaska Native Affairs
On Thursday, September 19, 2013
1324 Longworth House Office Building

Oversight Hearing on “Executive Branch standards for land-in-trust decisions for gaming purposes”

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The purpose of today’s hearing is to broadly examine the Administration’s process for approving gaming rights on lands acquired in trust after 1988.

To simplify the discussion of a complex issue, for the purpose of this hearing I will use the term “off-reservation gaming” to refer to tribal gaming conducted pursuant to any of the exceptions in Section 20(b) of the Indian Gaming Regulatory Act.

I have always been a strong advocate of Indian gaming. Indeed, I was the Ranking Republican Member of the Interior Committee which drafted and passed the Indian Gaming Regulatory Act, which was signed by President Ronald Reagan on October 17, 1988.

Tribal gaming has been one of the most successful revenue generators for tribal governments and it has raised the standard of living for many tribal communities in most regions of the United States.

It is because of my support for protecting the integrity of tribal gaming that I scheduled this hearing. The BIA’s recent approval – some would say “rubber-stamping” – of certain trust land applications over the objections of other tribes and surrounding communities is causing public support to erode for tribal gaming.

Many tribes are currently operating successful facilities on their own reservations in accordance with IGRA. However, the BIA is approving off-reservation facilities that threaten the viability of these existing operations.

It is remarkable how tone-deaf the Administration has been to concerns expressed by Members of Congress, Indian tribes, and other government officials regarding the impacts of off-reservation casinos. A number of Indian tribes understand what is at stake, and they are requesting reasonable policy changes.

The more that BIA approves off-reservation projects, the more that existing tribal operations are harmed, and the more States are encouraged to authorize private competition in urban areas, which may drain revenues from tribal casinos.

In this kind of scenario, who wins? It isn't the tribes.

It should be the objective of this Committee to consider reforming federal gaming policy to address growing opposition to off-reservation gaming so as to avoid a backlash that might reverse the gains that Indian Country fought for and won when IGRA was enacted.

The passage of a House bill this week to block an off-reservation casino in Phoenix is a sign of popular support for taking the off-reservation gaming rubber stamp away from the Administration, and letting Congress make decisions regarding gaming.